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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 000779

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR D, INR/R/MR, I/RW, I/REC; PA
SA/INS(FOR JWALLER); SA/PD (FOR LJIRWIN, LSCENSNY,
WREINCKENS); SSA/PAB

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KPAO](#) [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [OIIP](#) [CE](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: MEDIA PLAY: International "Safety Net" for Sri Lanka's
Peace Talks

1. Summary: The fate of the peace talks, together with international efforts to coax the LTTE back to the negotiating table, dominated the week's press. English and vernacular headlines chronicled a string of international visitors who made their way to the Wanni to encourage the LTTE to return to talks. Predictably, government-owned newspapers carried stronger, more positive headlines regarding the "safety net" of international involvement in the negotiations, while opposition and independent dailies focused more on one implication of a continued LTTE absence from the peace talks: loss of donor money. Frequent editorials in the English opposition newspaper focused on international involvement as "surreptitious attempts . to compromise the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka to keep the peace process on the track," although one government-owned paper weighed in on this theme as well. Early editorial comment in independent Tamil papers was concerned with the continuation of the peace talks, but later editorials became more outcome-oriented. Considering Assistant Secretary Rocca's impending visit, media coverage of international involvement in the peace process will likely continue over the weekend and into next week. End Summary.

Headlines.

2. Throughout the week, all major newspapers chronicled the activities of international visitors involved in re-starting the peace talks. The independent Tamil weekly, VIRAKESARI, ran a representative headline (5/04): "Important meetings this week in Vanni regarding the Tiger stand in peace talks -- Bala, leaders of LTTE, diplomats will take part." The DAILY MIRROR (independent English daily) continued on 5/5 with "Norway, Japan to try to restart peace bid." And two days later an independent Sinhala daily, LAKBIMA, headlined "'Safety net of the International Community supports us strongly' - says PM in the parliament."

3. Predictably, government-owned newspapers carried stronger, more positive headlines regarding international involvement. On 5/4 the SUNDAY OBSERVER (government-owned English weekender) headlined "Peace activities shift to Colombo & Vanni," and the Tamil weekly, THINAKARAN VAARAMANJARI, also government owned, reported "U.S. government interested in removing obstacles in peace process." On 5/5 the government-owned Sinhala daily, DINAMINA, led with "Akashi, Helgerson, Solheim and Westborg here: Christina Rocca will arrive on 12th, Balasingham came yesterday: a series of vital talks this week between GSL and LTTE." And the DAILY NEWS (government-owned English daily) wrote "Continuation of peace process -- diplomatic moves gather momentum" (on 5/6) and "Global Community will ensure resumption of peace process - PM" (on 5/7).

4. Opposition and independent papers focused on the implications of a continued LTTE absence from the peace talks. Under "UK to close doors for Bala if LTTE does not attend peace talks," the independent Sinhala LANKADEEPA SUNDAY wrote (on 5/4): "Diplomatic sources say that Anton Balasingham would be allowed to remain in the UK, which has also listed LTTE as a terrorist organization, only if the LTTE decides to attend the peace talks." Concerned with donor money, the opposition Sinhala daily, DIVAINA, headlined: "'Tokyo aid Conference vital for LTTE as well for GSL - Yasushi Akashi.'" And DIVAINA's English-medium sister, the ISLAND, continued the theme on 5/8 with "Global community will not pump funds if LTTE skips Tokyo confab - Solheim."

5. Late in the week, newspapers began to focus on the results of international pressure to re-start the peace talks. The independent Tamil daily, VIRAKESARI, headlined: "'Talks only after the government implements the decisions taken at talks' - Prabhakaran informs Japanese Special Envoy Akashi." "Norway delegates speak plain words to LTTE" said the government-owned Sinhala daily, DINAMINA. And on 5/8 the independent Tamil daily, THINAKKURAL, wrote

"It is the duty of the International Community to get us a proper reply from the government" - Prabhakaran tells Akashi at Kilinochchi," and "President unhappy that the international community did not assure the continuation of the talks without interruption."

Editorials.

16. Several editorials complained international involvement was a threat to Sri Lanka's sovereignty.

- Under "Don't barter sovereign rights," the ISLAND (opposition English daily) argued: "a few select ministers and top government officials along with representatives of foreign nations . cannot barter away the sovereign rights of the people of this country." Excerpts:

"Right now Norway's Deputy Foreign Minister Vidar Helgesen and Special envoy of the Japanese government, Yasushi Akashi are in the Wanni attempting to negotiate on an issue which is essentially an internal affair of Sri Lanka over which the country is rapidly losing control.

"We have over the years, by permitting and inviting foreign powers to come into the issue of quelling a terrorist uprising internationalized the issue to an extent that the sovereignty of this nation is being threatened by those whom we have invited as 'facilitators' and 'peace keepers'. ".Issues involving the sovereignty of the Sri Lankan nation are for the Sri Lankan State to decide and are no concern of foreigners. The president may keep mum and the prime minister may acquiesce but such rights of the nation cannot be surrendered in such a manner.

"All those involved in these so called peace negotiations should realize that a few select ministers and top government officials along with representatives of foreign nations-- irrespective of their power-cannot barter away the sovereign rights of the people of this country."

- Under the headline, "Meeting the Challenges of Peacemaking," government-owned English DAILY NEWS, said that, despite international assistance, "the Lankan parties cannot shun the basic parameters of finding a solution."

Excerpts:

"True, we are receiving the constructive and amiable assistance of foreign parties such as the Norwegian, Japanese and US Governments and the majority of Lankans are warmly appreciative of this help but the final peace could be evolved by only the Lankan parties involved.

"It is the Lankans themselves who would be finally bearing the burden of working out a power-sharing arrangement which would be fair by all our communities. Our foreign friends are only facilitators. This fact should be faced squarely and remembered constantly.

"However, the Lankan parties cannot shun the basic parameters of finding a solution: power-sharing within an united Sri Lanka where every community could live in dignity."

- Under "Wiles of Tiger allies" the ISLAND complained, "we see surreptitious attempts being made to compromise sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country to keep the peace process on the track." Excerpts:

"The Norway-led monitors seem to be never tired of working overtime to sanitise LTTE terrorism. They are at present labouring hard to elevate the so-called Sea Tigers to the level of the Sri Lanka Navy under the pretext of preventing clashes at sea.

"The peace process, we were told at the beginning was to protect the country. But today we see surreptitious attempts being made to compromise sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country to keep the peace process on the track."

"It is imperative that the President and the Prime Minister put the country before the peace process. The best way they can protect the national interest, which is under threat, is to throw out the whole caboodle of terror-allies in monitors' garb."

And a third ISLAND editorial, "The choice: Sovereignty of the nation or the 'Peace Process,'" noted that

"Representatives of mighty nations" must be told to respect Sri Lanka's integrity. Excerpts:

"President Kumaratunga, the opposition and the people cannot permit the government to cave into the demands of the terrorists and endanger the lives of about 50,000 soldiers in the north as well as the existence of the security establishments. Yesterday, in parliament former Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar made a scathing attack on the government and pointed out in detail to the steady erosion of the sovereignty of the country since the signing of the Ceasefire Agreement.

"The point has now been reached for the government to choose between safeguarding the sovereignty of the nation and saving the 'Peace Process'. Prime Minister Wickremasinghe, President Kumaratunga, the parliament and the people have no choice because the 'peace Process' is in the interests of the nation and the nation cannot be sacrificed for what ever cause.

"Representatives of mighty nations now pushing the government on the HSZ must be firmly told that protection

of the sovereignty of the Sri Lankan nation supersedes all other interests."

17. Editorial comment from Tamil newspapers was more positive.

- Under the headline "Talks to resume talks," the independent THINAKKURAL questioned "in what way are the talks going to proceed?" Excerpts:

"Even with Norway, Japan and some other members of the international communities engaging in putting the talks on track, they have failed to arrive at a firm decision.

"At the moment the talks should be solely based on resuming talks. If

Helgesen, Akashi, Bala, Professor Peiris, Milinda Moragoda and others have to fly from country to country to get out this situation, what and what will take place to bring lasting peace."

- Under the headline "Peace talks again," the independent Tamil daily, VIRAKESARI, noted that international shepherding of the peace process is a "good sign for the resumption of talks." Excerpts:

"There were requests from all corners that the talks should resume. India, which abstained from taking part in any talks, made a u-turn and said that the talks should resume under any circumstance. Pressure built up not only from the international community but also internally that the talks should resume.

"Soon talks will take place in Vanni with LTTE leader V. Prabhakaran to clear the obstacles and resume peace talks. LTTE theoretician Anton Balasingham, Norwegian Deputy Foreign Minister Vidar Helgesen, Norwegian Special envoy Eric Solheim, Former Norwegian Ambassador for Sri Lanka Jon Westborg and Japanese Special envoy Ysushi Akashi will participate in the discussions."

"All these are good signs for the resumption of talks."

- Finally, an editorial in the independent Tamil daily, VIRAKESARI reminded the LTTE that it has "a duty to perform in rebuilding North and East." Excerpts:

"Liberation Tigers have its duty to perform in rebuilding North and East. Oslo Conference has given the Liberation Tigers this responsibility and has expanded the role of the international community.

"Prime Minister had clarified that the international community will support only if steps are taken to develop not only North and East but the whole country."

Wills